

ART WITH A PURPOSE:
THE WORKS OF IVAN TURGENEV AND MIKHAIL GLINKA IN A SOCIAL CONTEXT

Katarzyna Sliwinska

Russia and Eurasia: Empires and Enduring Legacies

Pat Krafcik

In Russia, art has always served as a powerful device for the government, the church, and the people. While the tsars used art to demonstrate their power, the purpose of religious art was to help people learn about and praise God. Folk art, widespread all around the countryside, was created mostly for decoration. Peasants, through carving, painting, and embroidery expressed their culture and were able to pass it on to the next generation. Although this type of art was common among peasants and serfs, it was not popular enough to influence landlords in any way that might change a serfs' fate. In 19th century Russia there was no room in the common man's life for the personal expression of one's opinion, especially when it involved their underprivileged situation. With virtually no rights, serfs were forced to live preoccupied with harsh labor according to their landlord's demands. Not only were peasants forbidden to express any discontent but also on many occasions they did not have the means to do so. As a result artists were left with the burden of portraying the story and culture of the poorest of people. Driven by moral causes, artists believed in the need to improve the peasants' situation. The *intelligentsia* felt compelled to show the true lives of peasants, to raise awareness, and provoke thought about the conditions in which fellow human beings lived. Thus, artists, such as Ivan Turgenev and Mikhail Glinka, incorporated folklore, folk art, landscapes and motifs into their own works, emphasizing the importance of peasant culture on a national scale.

Born in 1818 into a wealthy family of landowners, Ivan Turgenev received the standard education for a young man of his status. He attended schools in Moscow, St. Petersburg, and Berlin. Although most of his years were lived in Europe, he experienced the

terrible exploitation of serfs while still in Russia, living on his mother's estate in Spasskoe.¹ Turgenev's opposition to serfdom had a great impact on his writing, resulting in the short story collection titled *Sketches from a Hunter's Album*. The *Sketches* are a series of narratives portraying Russian rural life, unified under a common narrator, the *Hunter*. At first, Turgenev's stories appeared separately, between 1847 and 1852 in *The Contemporary*, a literary magazine, published in St. Petersburg.² Reflecting the new mood of social awareness and responsibility, the *Sketches*, reached the educated community and exposed the injustice of serfdom. Turgenev's approach to the issue of serfdom was quite different from that of fellow artists. Instead of focusing on the landowners and their awful treatment of serfs, he concentrated on showing the individuality and the humanity of the oppressed. The first *Sketch*, "Khor and Kalinych," tells the story of the Hunter's visit at his fellow landowner's estate and his stay with peasants Khor and Kalinych. The two men are of quite different personalities; while Khor was practical, Kalinich expressed the features of a true romantic. In the story, the Hunter is able to converse and connect with the peasants on a much deeper level than with the landowner Potulykin.³ Turgenev recognizes peasants' intellect and the value of their lives, which he attempts to present to the *intelligentsia* by literary means. Most importantly he shows the broad spectrum of human personalities and qualities in the individual characters with whom the Hunter meets on his journey around the countryside. The detailed characteristics of peasants, their lives, thoughts and

¹ Patricia Krafcik, "Ivan Sergeevich Turgenev (1818-83)" (Russia and Eurasia: Empires and Enduring Legacies. TESC. January 22, 2013).

² Edward Garnett, *Turgenev: a Study* (London: W. Collins sons & co. ltd., 1917), 38-39.

³ Ivan Turgenev, *Sketches From a Hunter's Album*, trans. Richard Freeborn (London: Penguin Books, 1967), 25.

surroundings can be seen all throughout Turgenev's stories. One of the reasons his writing had a powerful effect on the society around him was that instead of focusing on the oppression of serfs alone, he took a more personal approach forming a subtle statement about the issue concerning serfdom. In *Sketches* he depicted peasants as individual, skilled, and intelligent human beings, whereas previously they were portrayed as faceless instruments in their landlords' hands.⁴ As considered by many critics and Turgenev himself, his work contributed to the emancipation of serfs in 1861.⁵ Turgenev used literature as a means of communicating political ideas on a public forum, where he could reach a wide audience. Even though he was not a radical himself, his literature became an inspiration for the *intelligentsia* and even the tsar himself to implement change.

Similarly, music in 19th century Russia was a form of expression, which served an educational purpose and created national consciousness among Russians. While classical music was the most popular, it was not until the 19th century, when Russian nationalistic music began to emerge. Prior to the Golden Age of Russian Culture, music in Russian cities existed either as simple melodic chants heard in Orthodox churches or was heavily influenced by Western composers. At that time Mikhail Glinka, the father of Russian classical music, decided to turn to traditional folk music, in order to find the Russian sound.⁶ Glinka drew his inspiration from legends and folk tunes, which he combined into operas and symphonies that became the backbone for Russian national music. His first major opera "A Life for the Tsar", which premiered in 1836, tells the story of a peasant

⁴ Krafcik, "Turgenev."

⁵ Victor Ripp, "Ideology in Turgenev's Notes of a Hunter: The First Three Sketches," *Slavic Review* 38, no. 1 (March, 1979): 75-76

⁶ Krafcik, "Nationalist Music of the 19th century" (Russia and Eurasia: Empires and Enduring Legacies. TESC. January 16, 2013).

hero, Susanin, who sacrificed his life in order to save tsar Mikhail Romanov from the Polish conspirators. By using the legend of *Ivan Susanin* as the subject of the opera and including scenes of peasant life and even traditional clothing, Glinka emphasized the importance of the common man in Russian culture on a national scale. Dedicated to create a truly Russian opera, he incorporated folk melodies in several of the arias played in “A Life for the Tsar.”⁷ Following Glinka’s example, various composers undertook projects, drawing from village songs, dances, and church chants. The Mighty Handful, a circle of amateur composers, which formed only a year before Glinka’s death in 1857, aspired to create a new musical style, one that was purely Russian. The members of “The Mighty Handful” tried to avoid imitation of European classics. With Balakirev as their leader, the group of five, wrote music that promoted nationalistic feelings. Consequently, “Glinka’s statement that ‘music is created by the [Russian] folk, and we composers only arrange it’ became a manifesto of Russian musical nationalism.”⁸

Russian artists used art as a public forum for social and national issues. While authors of the 19th century focused on improving the quality of life for peasants through their writing, composers aimed to create national identity by creating Russian style music. Ivan Turgenev and Mikhail Glinka were inspired by what they thought was the true Russian soul, which included folklore, village traditions and culture, as well as religious practices. Although, the two artists had different goals, both were able to inspire others and accomplish change through their creations.

⁷ Donald Jay Grout and Hermine Weigel Williams, *A Short History of Opera* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 510.

⁸ Inna Naroditskaya, *Bewitching Russian Opera: The Tsarina from State to Stage* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 151.

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Ivan Turgenev. Other prose writers. Anton Chekhov. The first Russian writer to be widely celebrated in the West, Turgenev managed to be hated by the radicals as well as by Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky for his dedicated Westernism, bland liberalism, aesthetic elegance, and tendency to nostalgia and self-pity. The Symbolists saw art as a way to approach a higher reality. The first wave of Symbolists included Konstantin Balmont (1867–1942), who translated a number of English poets and wrote verse that he left unrevised on principle (he believed in first inspiration); Valery Bryusov (1873–1924), a poet and translator of French Symbolist verse and of Virgil's Aeneid, who for years was the leader of the movement Poem Hunter all poems of by Ivan Turgenev poems. 48 poems of Ivan Turgenev. Phenomenal Woman, Still I Rise, The Road Not Taken, If You Forget Me, Dreams. The Rose. The last days of August. Autumn was already at hand. The sun was setting. A sudden downpour of rain, without thunder or lightning, had just passed rapidly over our wide plain. The garden in front of the house glowed and steamed, all filled with the fire of the sunset and the deluge of rain. She was sitting at a table in the drawing-room, and, with persistent dreaminess, gazing through the half-open door into the garden. I knew what was passing at that moment in her soul; I knew that, after a brief but agonising struggle, she was at that instant giving Read the full of The Rose.